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ABSTRACT

Observations of a 12-year-old boy provide an in-depth look at the writing of a successful adolescent writer, as it developed over a 2-year period. The subject was interviewed once a week in his home. In addition to the information obtained in interviews, his texts were analyzed for formal features. Three factors emerged as particularly facilitating for Simon's developing literacy: critical consciousness, exposure to media, and access to social support for writing. While these factors have the potential to affect strongly the development of literacy, these factors also interact with all other factors present in the writing situation. Consequently, they are not inherently facilitating or inhibiting since they are context-dependent. Although the active influence of these factors cannot guarantee success, their absence can signal writing problems. Therefore, educators should try to promote their interaction in the writing situation. However, trying to implement such a policy in the classroom is a difficult task that raises many pedagogical issues. Further research is needed into the role of these factors in literacy acquisition. (DF)

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Simon's Writing Develops: A Case Study of a Successful Adolescent Writer

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ABSTRACT

This case study presents an in-depth look at the writing of Simon, a successful adolescent writer, as it developed over a two-year period. Through regular interviews from age 12.11 to 15, Simon became a co-participant in the study. In addition to the information gained from interviews, his texts were analyzed for formal features. Simon was studied largely in the context of his home, where most of his writing was done, supported by a highly literate middle-class family.

Three factors emerged as particularly facilitating for Simon's developing literacy. Critical consciousness, exposure to media, and access to social support for writing have the potential to affect strongly the development of literacy. These factors continually interact with each other and all the other factors present in the writing situation. However, they are not inherently facilitating or inhibiting since they are context-dependent. Constantly changing conditions make the same factors work for and against development.

Though the active influence of these factors cannot predict success, their absence can signal writing problems. Therefore, educators should try to promote their interaction in the writing situation. However, trying to implement such a policy in the classroom is a difficult task raising many serious pedagogical issues. Much more research needs to be done investigating their roles in the acquisition of literacy.

Overall, this study reinforces the value of close observation of a single subject as a rich research tool.

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INTRODUCTION

The case study has traditionally been a fruitful method for investigating language, generating important hypotheses in the study of child language acquisition. In the field of composition and related areas connected with literacy and language development, the use of case studies has recently accelerated in connection with a broader move to naturalistic, context-dependent investigations of how language develops. The goal of much of this research is to study the factors that facilitate or inhibit language development and to determine the possible role of intervention in the process.

Case studies in composition have focused primarily on high school and college students in a school setting (Emig, Perl, Hardcastle, et al.), young children in school (Graves, Calkins, Dyson) and young children at home and school (Bissex, Taylor). In spite of the fact that Britton and Loban both give evidence of a great leap in ability at 9th grade (the beginning of Piaget's stage of formal operations), no one had examined the writing processes of a child that age longitudinally.

In order to investigate what factors facilitate writing development, I closely observed a successful adolescent male writer, Simon, for two years in the context where most of his writing was done, his home. I chose as my subject someone who I felt possessed the ingredients for success: interest in writing, a family of professionals who supported that interest, and a home that reflected the influence of literacy. Certain factors such as the influence of reading and other media on writing, the

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social aspects of writing, and the metacognitive awareness of the subject emerged as being particularly facilitating. My study presents data demonstrating the complexity of interactions that support the development of writing skill in a successful child. As well as generating hypotheses for further study, some of this data provides support and qualification for hypotheses already presented by other researchers.

DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY

Subject. My subject is Simon (a pseudonym used to protect his anonymity), a white middle-class male. There are several reasons why he made a good subject: 1) I wanted to study an adolescent, and he was 12.11 when the study began in 1982. 2) He is not verbally precocious. His scores on intelligence tests do not indicate an unusually high verbal I.Q., nor is his vocabulary unusually large for his age. His reading ability during the period of the study was not very far above grade level. Though they thought of him as a good writer, none of his teachers felt that his writing was beyond the range of others in the class. 3) He is interested in becoming a writer, so he wanted very much to participate and retained his enthusiasm and willingness to cooperate. He has another advantage over many teen-age subjects in that he is unusually articulate about his writing processes. He often knows precisely when an idea for a story came from his reading and is able to pinpoint when he did the reading and what details he is borrowing. 4) His family value literacy and were willing to cooperate. 5) I was able to establish rapport with

him.

Methodology. Over a two-year period I conducted taped half hour interviews with Simon in his home. Initially I tried to see him once a week. Then the interviews were reduced to once every two weeks, which seemed sufficient for me to follow his progress without interfering with his other obligations. During the two years, I was able to follow closely what Simon was reading for school and for pleasure and what he was writing both in school and for himself. I tried to read what he was reading and collected all of his writing.

In addition to interviewing Simon at home, I visited the schools he attended and spoke with his teachers. I also questioned his family extensively, interviewing his mother either before or after seeing him. Simon's father and brothers were also consulted and were important sources of information. Another technique that provided rich data was having Simon's mother leave the tape recorder on when they were working together on a paper. However, this was limited by Simon's reluctance to be taped under certain conditions.

FINDINGS

This in-depth examination of Simon and his writing provides a fine-grained description of an individual acting within a context during a certain fixed period. Such a description does not lead to universal generalizations applicable across cases. What it does do, very effectively I might add, is to generate hypotheses whose validity can then be tested on other cases or larger groups. The hypotheses generated from the close observation of

Simon, ages 12.11 to 15, break new ground, support and extend existing theoretical positions, suggest opportunities for intervention, and reflect on methodology. They do not try to demonstrate a single cause and effect relationship. Rather they deal with instances where multiple causes and effects interacted, suggesting possible facilitating factors in the acquisition of literacy and techniques to try to aid that acquisition.

HYPOTHESES

Hypothesis I. Three factors--critical consciousness, exposure to media, and access to social support for writing--have the potential to affect strongly the development of literacy.

Early in the study, these three aspects of the writing situation began to emerge as important influences on Simon's thinking and behavior. A review of all the tapes, notes, and papers at the end of the study confirmed the consistency with which these factors could be shown to interact to influence Simon's writing development. A more detailed report of the study demonstrates graphically how consistently these factors were discussed by Simon, as well as many examples which show how the individual factor operated to influence specific pieces of writing.

Hypothesis II. These factors continually interact with each other and all the other factors present in the writing situation.

In order to fully understand the impact of metacognition, media, and collaboration on Simon's writing, they need to be examined both individually and interactively. These factors

never operate in isolation from each other, though linear text has a hard time describing their interplay since all of the interactions are complex, ever-varying, and ongoing within a context.

In Simon's case his family and school form the primary context for his writing. He brings into that context his internalized notions about himself as a person and as a writer, about his audience, and about the task at hand. These constitute his metacognitive and critical outlook, and they set up the circumstances in which stimuli from his environment are perceived. For example, because Simon views himself as a writer, he reads a book in a certain way. As he reads, he may relate what he is reading to what he has written in the past, what he may be working on now, or what he will be writing in the future. Because his family provides the social context for his literacy development, he will be likely to share what he is reading with them. In doing so, he hears and sometimes internalizes, or sometimes argues against and opposes their opinions. If they are all exposed to a television program, the discussion will probably include evaluative remarks. These work to develop Simon's critical awareness and sensibilities which he in turn brings to his next exposure to media.

Hypothesis III. These factors are not inherently facilitating or inhibiting since they are context dependent. Constantly changing conditions make the same factors work for and against development.

I have identified factors which have some salience in the situation whether by their presence or absence, whether

facilitating or inhibiting, positive or negative. Examples from the study illustrate their generally facilitating effect on Simon. However, it is important to remember that they operate in specific situations, and as such function differently each time even for the same individual.

Metacognition, media, and the social context are not always active factors in a writing situation, but they are always present. In addition, their influence when salient can be positive or negative. The same circumstances that will usually foster success can sometimes be the source of inhibition and failure. Too much self-awareness can be paralyzing; television may be a good source for acquisition, but some children watch too much television and don't read; collaboration can be distorted into a reliance on others to do your work. There is no way to predict what the interactions in an specific situation will be.

All these factors played an active role in Simon's development but a variable one--not beneficial in every case. The same self-awareness that made Simon view himself as a good writer and allowed him to judge his audience fairly accurately sometimes caused problems when he felt what he produced wasn't up to his standards or that he didn't want to put forth the effort which he was only too aware the task required. Simon's excellent ability to recall details of what he had read and viewed to use in his own writing created self-doubts about his originality and ability to create anything really new. His interactions with his mother produced occasional worries about dependency or anger and frustration because he wasn't really ready for help or was just

using the interaction as an opportunity to avoid getting down to work. In each case, the kind of relationship that was facilitating could change over time or in specific circumstances to be more or less successful.

Since the overwhelming evidence from this study is that on the whole these factors interacted productively, it seems worth introducing them explicitly into the writing situation with the caution that success is not guaranteed in every instance even for the same person.

Hypothesis IV. Though the active influence of these factors in a writing situation cannot predict success, their absence can signal writing problems.

The claim is being made that these three factors are extremely important to continued successful acquisition of literacy; but there is no claim that their presence assures success, or that they will be equally important for all children. However, their absence in a situation can be crucial given the historical importance of metacognition in promoting literacy, the amount of exposure to media in this culture, and the recent studies by researchers such as Kroll and Salomon that have reported the benefits parental help and encouragement give children.

Since metacognition has been shown by several researchers to contribute to writing success, the inability to view oneself as a writer, judge audience, and think about the cognitive tasks necessary for performing a writing assignment will interfere with success. In addition, studies such as Luria's and Scribner and Cole's indicate that certain types of literacy training promote

specific Western patterns of reasoning that are based on metacognitive awareness of cognitive strategies. Thus literacy activates and foregrounds certain cognitive abilities of a society through training. As Taylor's Family Literacy suggests, that training begins before formal schooling in families where the acquisition of literacy is expected and parents serve as role models for children. These parents provide children with stimuli in the form of books, television, and films.

Hypothesis V. Given the importance of critical consciousness, exposure to media, and access to collaborators, educators should try to promote their interaction in the writing situation. However, trying to implement such a policy in the classroom is a difficult task raising many serious pedagogical issues.

Teaching or encouraging metacognition is a particularly sensitive issue. Knowing that metacognitive awareness helps writing most of the time doesn't tell us specifically how or when. In addition, there is a delicate balance between facilitation and inhibition. Teachers have several problems to consider. For example, self-awareness has been shown to be helpful to writers. This self-awareness includes a realistic appraisal of one's own abilities, i.e. I'm better at writing fiction than expository essays. When should students be encouraged to arrive at this critical appraisal of themselves? If it happens too early, they may be afraid to try something that they have decided is beyond their ability. Adolescents are generally insecure and self-critical anyway. How much can we encourage self-appraisal without reinforcing negative feelings?

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Perhaps there are ways to make adolescents feel they are not alone by helping them share their self-doubts with peers or the teacher. However, this too requires a delicate balance. Some young people are very unwilling to share private thoughts. Simon reacts very negatively to teachers who ask personal questions or who assign writing topics that call for a revelation of personal feelings. The teacher, of course, can share her own experiences and feelings of self-doubt with the students. However, while this is helpful in some situations, there is also the risk of telling the students more than they wish to know or are ready to deal with. There is no blanket solution that will cover all situations. Each must be handled in a sensitive way by a teacher who can evaluate the needs of individual students.

There are also problems involved with raising awareness of problem solving strategies from a tacit to a focal level. Once a student becomes focally aware of the strategies he uses when he writes, for example, a certain amount of self-consciousness enters and that self-consciousness can be inhibiting. How does, or can, the student return to a state where these processes function on a tacit level again?

There is also a danger that certain models of metacognition will be presented as the "correct" methods. The process model of writing is a good example. We must not teach students that the process model, beginning with pre-writing in the form of clustering, free-writing etc., writing the body of the piece, and ending with revision as a separate process, is the only way to write. Individual differences and cognitive styles must be respected. Simon feels most secure when he has a model to follow

and can make an outline of what he wants to write. These are his metacognitive strategies, and they function effectively for him. We cannot expect Simon to forego outlining when that process helps him organize. Nor should we insist that others outline if the procedure isn't productive for them. As teachers, we need to make a variety of strategies available so that students can choose what best suits their own cognitive styles. Any recommendations for increasing metacognitive awareness must be applied with sensitive consideration of the maturity, readiness, and individual processes of the student.

Readiness also seems to be the key to using media to aid the acquisition of writing skills. Schools need to be more aware of what students are reading for pleasure and need to encourage that type of reading. When students are asked to read at a level beyond their ability, or far from their interests, the desire to read for pleasure is quenched, discouraging rather than encouraging the important process of reading to gain knowledge. Schools can investigate student's reading preferences by conducting reading interest surveys and then using that information to plan curriculum and stretch those interests.

This study demonstrated that Simon learned a great deal about writing, for example ideas about genre, character, and setting, not just from reading but from exposure to other media such as television and film. Television and film both need to be utilized more than they have been to foster writing acquisition. There has been a fear that this generation raised on television

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doesn't read, and that fear is not without foundation. This raises the issue of encouraging television and film viewing at the expense of reading. Perhaps part of the solution would be teaching a more critical view of television and film just as we teach a critical view of reading, encouraging reading the books on which television shows and films are based, and using television and film as material for writing assignments. Teachers need to investigate and acknowledge the cognitive benefits of television and film rather than just dismissing or ignoring these powerful forces.

The issue of collaboration is also a sensitive one. Whether the collaborators are grandmother/grandchild, mother/child, teacher/pupil, or peers, the same issue arises. We must deal with critics who object to collaboration because they stress self-reliance, learning through one's own mistakes and failures. Such an educational philosophy that insists on each pupil struggling alone no matter what the circumstances doesn't take into account the reality of our educational system. Part of that reality is the frustration that results from the mismatch between demands and readiness.

When we place people in situations where there is a great deal of pressure for success, the situation of an American child in an academic setting, we should enable them to achieve that success. Providing collaborators for writing seems to be an easy way to achieve this end.

One way to help is to consider stages of development when we make demands of students (and we do demand when we are in control.) We need to be especially careful in regard to young

students who are vulnerable and lack confidence in their ability to perform schoolwork. We must weigh the benefits of self-reliance against the benefits of positive reinforcement. Psychologists are well aware that positive reinforcement produces duplication of a desired behavior while negative reinforcement does not.

Many children already have an advantage because they are raised in families where literacy is a part of family life. Taylor in Family Literacy talks about typical middle class families where the parents automatically expect academic success for their children. Failure is not an option and the families will do whatever is necessary to ensure success whether that means help from parents or outside tutoring. We must find ways to help families achieve that success and to help students who don't have these advantages.

Who should the collaborators be? Teachers can be collaborators by following the conferencing techniques outlined by Graves in Writing: Teachers and Children at Work. Students can be taught to work together or to conference with themselves. When these writers have their own children, perhaps they will be able to work with them. However, until that time we can encourage families to take an active role in children's learning. In Simon's home the parents see themselves as agents, extensions of the school. The children learn in a rich environment with support available from parents and the other children. Parents don't have to be experts to perform these roles. Often a sounding board for ideas or someone to clarify an assignment is

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all that is needed. Most of us have adequate literacy skills to act as collaborators. Specific expert help can be left to the teacher.

Asking parents to help children is not without problems. Parents who are committed to helping their children with schoolwork at home have the problem of finding the time. This is especially difficult when both have careers. Simon's family is especially committed to helping their children succeed in school and achieve their potential, but problems with time management do arise. When the situation in the home is stressful, its hard for Simon's mother to find time to work with him. When she's busy, she's reluctant to spend the time, especially if he doesn't want to do anything on his own, and it's her task to motivate him. One of his conflicts is the lack of time to do both his own writing projects and the school assignments. As a result, he often resents the school writing assignments, and she finds herself in the position of having to encourage him to do them. If she is busy trying to meet her own needs and the needs of the other members of the family at the same time, it's very difficult and sometimes impossible to give everyone the support they require. Nevertheless, for the acquisition of literacy to take place we seem to need a successful child and facilitating family.

One way to help parents help children would be for school systems to conduct brief training sessions at the beginning of the school year to train parents in techniques such as Bruner's scaffolding and give them guidelines for taking advantage of Vygotsky's zone of proximal development. The time invested by the school will be worthwhile if parents feel

comfortable about helping their children at home and can function as tutors. For the parents, that time investment at school will allow them to help their children more efficiently at home. Training and use of older students and peers to act as tutors has the same potential for making the job of the school easier and aiding in the overall acquisition of literacy.

Hypothesis VI. Our ideas regarding these factors need to be adjusted and expanded. Much more research needs to be done investigating their roles in the acquisition of literacy.

Each of these factors is very complex, making them extremely difficult to define. Future research should be aimed at refining and clarifying these concepts. Metacognition is especially difficult to pin down, and it has not been my purpose to fully define it here. However, this study does focus on some of the problems that still need to be considered: (1) There is still no clear-cut way to distinguish fully between cognitive and metacognitive acts. (2) Current definitions of metacognition tend to ignore rhetorical considerations such as audience, lumping them together with views of the self and the world. (3) Metacognition, itself, is a much broader term than is often acknowledged embracing internalized views of the self and the world (as Flavell proposes) but also encompassing the developing critical sensibility (stance) of an individual.

The concept of input also has been too limited in most studies. Krashen has provided valuable insight into the role of comprehensible input from reading in writing acquisition. Now his hypotheses need to be extended to the other sources that can

serve as comprehensible input for literacy. Other people we interact with, especially family members, act as role models for behavior involving literacy activities. Specific input that relates to writing is available from reading but also from various types of media that the modern child is exposed to. Salomon makes the claim that the media are highly influential in developing cognitive abilities. This study points to specific writing concepts that are acquired from television for example, such as genre and character. We must broaden our concepts of media to include all of these other influences in the environment of the developing individual.

Another central issue has to do with defining the relationship between observational learning and teaching. If we accept Krashen's hypothesis and the evidence from this study that a great number of global and sentence-level features are acquired from reading, what is the role of the teacher? What can the teacher do to aid this acquisition other than supplying reading material? When should the concepts that are learned through exposure to comprehensible input be made focal? How can teachers structure the curriculum to best guide and focus the unconscious acquisition of their students, taking advantage of observational learning but enhancing it with pointed teaching?

The role of the family in the acquisition of literacy is still largely ignored and the social context of learning too narrowly defined. While the school setting and input from peers has a major influence on learning, the family has the most direct and important role, influencing attitudes toward reading and writing that are formed long before school begins. There is an

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assumption that once children enter school most writing is done there. While it could be argued that young children do much of their learning to write and writing at school, adolescents do more of it outside of school in the form of homework assignments. This is especially true of Simon who does most of his writing at home (and has done so since sixth grade) and whose home is the context in which most talk about writing occurs. There is also a great deal of other writing that is done outside of school: lists, notes, letters, personal writing, diaries, journals, imaginative writing to name a few. The home as the context where most of this writing is done needs more investigation through case studies of successful writers of various ages from a wide range of socio-economic and ethnic groups, including non-native speakers of English.

Another reason to set a study in the home is the degree of intimacy that can develop between co-participants that is difficult to achieve in a school setting. There the researcher, unless she is the teacher or works directly with the child, is more of an observer and less of a participant. The atmosphere is affected by the child's attitude toward the school setting and this and the influence of peers must be accounted for and related to the acquisition of literacy. The home provides a more relaxed atmosphere, away from the social pressures of the schoolroom, where the acquisition of literacy can be isolated more easily.

Adolescents have been a neglected group. One of the reasons why adolescents have been studied so little is the fact that they enter a period at puberty when many are reticent and reluctant to

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discuss their behavior with outsiders, especially adults. Even Simon, who was most co-operative for two years, entered a period after the study was over where he preferred to keep his writing to himself and not share it with anyone including his mother. It is doubtful that a study such as this one could have been conducted during this period of his development. The researcher needs a finer understanding of the various stages of adolescence than the current crude definition, which is linked to age, provides. Then the case study must be tuned to the readiness of the participant to engage in social relationships and must remain aware that the relationships between the child, home, and school can change dramatically at any time.

Hypothesis VII. Success should be defined developmentally and be applicable to process as well as product.

I wanted to conduct a study that investigated successful achievement, so I was looking for a subject who was a successful student writer. I was dissatisfied with traditional criteria for determining success that limits it to successful performance on writing tasks graded by authorities. Yet my own views were vague, and it wasn't until I was immersed in the study that I was able to formulate a more developmental definition of success.

Initially, I had a rather superficial though unorthodox definition. Simon could be defined as a successful writer because he was a success within the context in which his writing was done. He viewed himself as basically successful though he certainly had his failures. This view was corroborated by the fact that he received good grades on papers, and his teachers said he was a good writer. His family also presented a great

deal of anecdotal and written evidence in the form of old papers that identified him as a success in his writing endeavors. As the study progressed, another hypothesis grew out of the data. Success could be defined developmentally and could relate to process as well as product. That was an appealing hypothesis because it fit the current philosophical stance presented by process writing theories. Rather than using outside evaluation of texts as the primary criterion for success, the focus could shift to view success as a perception by the writer or reader growing out of the local context. This notion is especially important for the young writer who can then feel successful about progress he has made as his writing improves, even if the final product has not reached some idealized stage of perfection. Readers, particularly teachers, can then reward improvement and development as well as final achievement.

COUNTER-EVIDENCE FOR CURRENT ASSUMPTIONS

In addition to presenting various hypotheses for further testing, this study supplies evidence that counters certain current ideas about writing. Some of these ideas reflect the findings of other researchers. Others constitute a type of "folk wisdom" about writing, and as such influence teaching as well as the public's conception of what makes a good writing situation. Their perpetuation interferes with successful acquisition.

School-sponsored writing is less interesting to the writer than self-sponsored writing. Evidence that Simon becomes just as interested in and involved with school assignments as he does

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with his own writing, and his frustration and boredom with both refines Emig's identification of extensive writing with school-sponsored writing and reflexive writing with self-sponsored writing (91). Her generalization reflects the popular attitude that only writing assignments chosen by the writer can fully engage his interest. While Simon had freedom in choosing specific topics at school, the choice was still restricted to specific subject areas such as "Favorite Author." Nevertheless, some of his choices, such as a paper he wrote on the galaxy for his science class, fascinated him. Others, such as the topic of Judo he chose for an "I Search" paper, turned out to be boring. Some school projects even took precedence over his own writing at home. He worked on an English class assignment to write a script for a favorite television program after school was over and neglected his own "Long Story."

The orthodox process model with its "stages" of writing works for everyone. An individual case study reminds us that each person learns and performs in different ways and must be given freedom to use whatever strategies he finds most effective. There are several ways in which Simon's writing process differs from the current popular model. In addition to outlining, he does a lot of revising in his head and in notes before he ever begins to write a first draft. Forcing him to make major revisions at the end, or to write additional drafts just to prove that he is revising when he doesn't feel that is necessary is an unproductive procedure. There is a great deal of anecdotal evidence that some writers faced with certain writing tasks can do so much planning in their heads that they can begin, write

straight through an essay, and make very few changes. Again, students should be exposed to a variety of techniques and allowed to choose what works best for them.

When parents help children, they become dependent and can't work alone. Simon's development throughout the study indicated that he sometimes needed a lot of help and at other times did not. Simon's brothers, who were helped a great deal by their parents when they were young, report that they gradually took over all their own writing assignments with no difficulty. Simon's mother's writing history provides additional evidence that help can be beneficial if it is provided when needed and that the developing child will outgrow the need on his own. When she was in seventh grade, she had to write a theme every week. She would discuss them with her mother either on Saturday or Sunday for several hours. Her mother would help her conceive how she was going to write, but she would write it herself. She never felt her mother was doing the work for her and retained her sense of ownership even though she found herself adopting her mother's language and sense of humor. By the middle of eighth grade she no longer needed this kind of help.

Writers prefer to work alone and only share finished products. The romantic notion of the writer alone in his study, hiding his pages from prying eyes seems far from reality. Many writers such as Simon can be enriched and inspired by interacting with others who are interested in their writing. In spite of the fact that Simon is a very private person who doesn't like to discuss personal feelings, and who is shy, he was very willing to discuss

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his writing with a stranger, me, and allow me to return on a regular basis, have access to drafts, and work in progress. This interaction was highly valuable for Simon as it confirmed the fact that others could be interested in his writing, and gave him more social support.

There is a great deal of anecdotal evidence that most writers even the most "private" share their work in progress with someone. Usually they are in touch with their editors. Many famous writers have maintained sustained correspondence with trusted friends in which they have discussed their writing in progress.

Unsuccessful cases tell us more than successful ones. Much educational research has focused on unsuccessful writing--the problems of students from elementary school to university in learning to read and write. Much less time and effort have been spent looking at successful cases and trying to determine the factors that have contributed to this success. Those studies that have focused on successful writers, such as studies by Bissex, Graves, Taylor, are primarily of young children. This study demonstrates that a great deal of important information about achieving success comes from observing a successful, rather than unsuccessful writer. Seeing the factors in Simon's environment that contribute to his success helps us analyze what is missing in cases of unsuccessful acquisition.

THE CASE STUDY RE-EXAMINED

Conducting a case study is a process of discovery. The case study provides a situation full of rich possibilities for

generating hypotheses that emerge from the data itself. In addition, because the case study format is new to the field of composition, its methodology has not been formalized. This gives the researcher the opportunity to explore, experiment, and learn. I want to review some of the things I learned while conducting this case study that may be of interest to those who wish to carry out close observations of single subjects.

Choosing a subject. One of the most important decisions involves choosing a subject. Establishing rapport between the participants in a case study is of primary importance. Feeling that I could establish a relationship of mutual trust was necessary before I could begin. If I had felt that it wouldn't be possible to establish that relationship, I would have looked for another participant. Knowing the family and conducting the study in the home rather than the school were pluses. The family support and endorsement gave me a degree of credibility and trustworthiness with Simon that I might have had trouble developing on my own. For Simon, the home environment was a safer place to be during the interviews than the school.

I have already discussed my developing definition of success, but not how choosing someone who felt successful influenced the gathering of information. Because Simon felt like a writer, he was anxious to discuss his writing. If he had felt insecure, writing would have been a painful subject to discuss. No reassurance that an "outside expert" had read his essays and pronounced him a success would have counteracted that insecurity.

Defining my role. When I began the study, I had a naive

conception of the role of the researcher and the subject. I thought that my aim should be to interfere as little as possible with the subject and the interactions within his environment. The ideal situation would be that of a "fly on the wall" who could see without being seen. Naturally that state was impossible to achieve, nor would it have obtained the information I was looking for. Though I couldn't attain that level of detachment, I tried to remain uninvolved by telling Simon that I wouldn't comment on any of his writing. Simon accepted this, but I found it was a stance that was impossible to maintain. As our relationship developed, I wanted to give him feedback on the writing he was showing me. In fact, trying to maintain a false objectivity was beginning to interfere with the development of a real relationship between two human beings. I come away from the study strongly convinced that the researcher is part of the context and there is no way to avoid that situation. Instead it should be acknowledged and accounted for in the results.

While I was discovering new dimensions to my role as a researcher, I became aware that Simon was not a "subject" to be observed like a chimpanzee in the wild. Simon, rather than I, was the true expert on his writing development. While I could bring a certain theoretical knowledge to my observations, I needed his participation to supply the examples and to evaluate their relationship to the theory. my theorizing. I could no longer view him as a subject. Instead he evolved into a co-participant, as did his mother.

Structuring the interviews. My acknowledgment of Simon's role as a co-participant changed my conception of the interviews.

Originally I searched for models of case study interviews, since as a novice interviewer I wanted the security that a pre-arranged format would provide. Fortunately, no such models were available because I found that the best method of gaining information was by using open ended questions that let Simon establish the direction of the interviews. Even the frequency of the interviews gradually evolved to an "on demand" schedule, with Simon requesting a meeting because he had something he wanted to discuss or show me. Nor did the interviews immediately present me with exciting hypotheses. I soon found that a case study researcher has to have a great deal of patience regarding results. Though I was aware of certain trends, it wasn't until I reviewed and analyzed all my tapes, after the formal study was completed, that I could firmly establish recurring themes.

Ecological validity. As I gradually evolved a methodology focused around Simon's perceptions, I was able to achieve a higher degree of ecological validity. Bronfenbrenner reminds us that an ecological orientation emphasizes "the subject's definition of the situation (and) accords far more importance to the knowledge and initiative of the person under study (32).

Ideally, I would have liked to have been able to present a full ecological description, as well as an ecologically valid one, but that would have involved as detailed an observation of Simon at his school as I conducted at his home. Though I did visit all of the schools Simon attended during the study and interviewed all his teachers, time constraints forced me to concentrate on one setting, the home, with resulting neglect of

another, the school. Detailed observation and recording of an adolescent's experience and analysis of the school setting remains to be done.

Recommendations. At the present time, there is no orthodox case study methodololgy for studying literacy. The case study does not lend itself to a formulaic structure. Given the goal of maintaining ecological validity, strategies can be developed that reflect individual preferences resulting from differences in temperament. To be truly effective, the individual case study must be adjusted to the personality of the researcher and the co-participant. An atmosphere of safety and trust that will enable the best exchange of information needs to be established. Some experimentation with different formats and techniques by the researcher can determine the most effective methods for proceeding within that context.

I believe the richness of the data presented in this study and the number of hypotheses generated argues for more case studies. A study such as this one focusing on the school situation would be one such possibility. Other possibilities are studies of successful students from various socio-economic groups in the home and the school. The effect of the home or living environment of college students has never been investigated. With each portrait of an individual child, we are reminded of the richness and diversity of the population that fills our schools and turns to us for help in achieving success.

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